As Chair of the CIVICUS alliance and as a long-standing member of CIVICUS, I am proud to share this year’s Annual Report. What’s featured in the following pages is proof that we can make a difference even in these challenging times, and that by working together, leveraging data for impact, concentrating our efforts where they are most needed, listening, and continually adapting to changing circumstances, we can and will realise our vision of a worldwide community of inspired, informed, committed citizens engaged in confronting the challenges facing humanity.

The advances made by CIVICUS this year are both internal – building the infrastructure and systems that will allow CIVICUS to do its work at the highest level – and external – building the reach of the organisation and engaging our members and partners in new and impactful ways that respond to evolving challenges.

• Our thought leadership and research on civic space continues to be our cornerstone
  The CIVICUS Monitor, which tracks the status of civic space restrictions by country, reached over 46,000 unique web visitors, engaged 21 partners worldwide in joint work, registered 657 updates, and now includes a ‘watch list’ function so that we can connect our research work with our advocacy efforts in order to identify countries where interventions are still possible to ‘hold the line’ and prevent further deterioration of civic freedoms.

• Our members are the heart of our alliance
  442 of you replied to our Annual Constituency Survey. Your invaluable feedback steers us on a daily basis to respond more effectively to your needs on the ground. Particularly as those needs shift and our membership broadens and becomes more diverse through welcoming individual activists, social, and protest movements, we are building more ways to listen and gather feedback to ensure continuous improvement and connect you to each other.

• This year we reached and engaged more individuals than ever before, both online and offline
  Together with CIVICUS member PIANGO (Pacific Islands Associations of NGOs), the Secretariat brought together 634 delegates from 115 countries for our flagship International Civil Society Week in Fiji in December 2017 to work together on creating solutions for global challenges and sharing what works to influence decision-makers. To broaden participation beyond those physically present, 12 local and one virtual event took place preceding ICWS to gather input from communities around the world. And because of connections made at the event, the alliance was invited to participate in negotiations on adapting the language of the Global Compact on Migration.

Our voice as an alliance is getting louder
We published 66 opinion articles and 54 media statements this year in a wide variety of print and online publications. 437 articles were written about CIVICUS and its work in 17 languages, reaching tens of millions of people worldwide.

Our capacity for public engagement is growing
This year as part of the SPEAK! 2017 campaign – four days of action dedicated to amplifying the voices of citizens and connecting activists world-wide – we supported more than 200 partner organisations to convene 232 events in 65 countries, and reached over 7.5 million online.

• This year also marked the first year of implementation of CIVICUS’s 2017-2022 Strategic Plan. This report tracks progress in each of our four areas of strategic focus: defending civic freedoms and democratic values; strengthening the power of people to organise, mobilise, and take action; empowering a more accountable, innovative and effective civil society; and building a world-class organisation. For full disclosure (and as detailed in the Lessons Learned section), this year has been a whirlwind as we ‘built the plane as we were flying it.’ Particularly given the bumps in the road, I would like to especially thank our staff and our donors who have displayed patience and resilience as we worked to get things right. That said, I feel confident we are on track and look forward to working together to achieve our ambitious goals.

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

"ADVANCES MADE THIS YEAR ARE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL – BUILDING THE INFRASTRUCTURE AND SYSTEMS TO DO OUR WORK AT THE HIGHEST LEVEL, WHILE BUILDING OUR REACH AND DEEPENING OUR ENGAGEMENT."

"THIS YEAR WE REACHED AND ENGAGED MORE INDIVIDUALS THAN EVER BEFORE, BOTH ONLINE AND OFFLINE."

ANNUAL REPORT 2017–2018

ANNUAL REPORT 2017–2018
None of the impact presented in this year’s report would have been possible without the tireless efforts and leadership of CIVICUS Secretary General Danny Sriskandarajah. As many of you know, Danny will be leaving CIVICUS in December 2018. Over the last six years he has built and nourished the organisation with an activist’s heart and a strategist’s mind. His commitment to human rights and to those at the grassroots has been a source of inspiration to many across our network. I have had the privilege of working closely with Danny over the last several years; his presence is a gift. The entire CIVICUS alliance – from the Board to staff to members to partners – will miss him greatly and wish him all the very best.

We are so fortunate to welcome Lysa John as CIVICUS’s fifth Secretary General in January 2019. The extensive global search process that brought her to us speaks to our organisational maturity and good governance. Lysa has an extensive track record of international mobilisation skills and is a global thinker, passionate grassroots campaigner, and a thought leader with creative vision. I know she will bring fresh energy to our alliance and our collective mission to work for a more just, inclusive, and sustainable world.

I look forward to working with Lysa and all of you in the year ahead.

In solidarity and thanks,

Anabel Cruz
Chair, CIVICUS Board of Directors
MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL

In my first Annual Report for CIVICUS, back in 2012, I wrote how struck I had been in my first six months in post by the truly unique nature of our organisation. We were, I remarked, one of the very few whose primary role it is to protect and promote civil society all over the world. And, as my time at CIVICUS draws to a close, that remains unchanged. It is a role, I am convinced, that over the last six years has become more important.

We’re living in an age of rising inequality and insecurity, divisive ideologies are polarising our societies and many of our hard-won rights and freedoms are under attack. All over the world, levels of trust and engagement are falling. People are feeling disenfranchised, excluded and disillusioned. Multilateralism is weakening, climate catastrophe seems increasingly inevitable and populist strongmen are seizing power. Civic space is at risk not just in autocracies and fragile democracies, but all over the world. More than three billion of us now live in countries where our basic freedoms are seriously restricted. Our democracies – we, the people – are under siege.

But my time at CIVICUS has made me hopeful.

Hopeful because of the amazing activists I have met around the world who are daring to disrupt and to innovate; to organise and mobilise in new and creative ways to defend civic freedoms, to fight for social justice and equality and to push back against populism.

Hopeful because these activists are fighting, not only to defend the democratic achievements of the past, but also to advance the fundamental values of our open societies today and for the future.

Hopeful because wherever I have been, I have encountered not just frustration with broken politics, but a desire to shape better democracies; to sate an unquenched thirst for participation; to re-imagine democracy for a new age.

For most of human history we were subjects – ruled by monarchs and chiefs, with few rights and little power. For the last few hundred years, with the advent of democracy and capitalism, we were promised emancipation, but have become little more than consumers. I am convinced that the 21st century will be the century of the citizen; a new era in which we are more empowered, more connected and more equal. That is why I am hopeful.

I am also proud of the part that CIVICUS has played, and will continue to play, in all of this. Over the last six years, we have consolidated our core, we’ve experimented, innovated, led, collaborated, learned and grown. We’re now a larger organisation than ever before and, I believe, well-equipped to flourish under new leadership.

Of course, I couldn’t sign off without expressing my thanks to our inspirational network of members, our eyes and ears on the ground, all over the world; to our Board who, under the leadership of our Chair, Anabel Cruz, have done so much to support, guide and encourage us over the last six years; and to our donors who have partnered with us to bring so many ambitious plans to fruition. My thanks also to the amazing staff team at CIVICUS who continue to work tirelessly towards our shared goals.

It is with great honour – and gratitude – that I submit the 2017/2018 CIVICUS Annual Report to our members.

Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah
Secretary-General, CIVICUS
CIVICUS is a global alliance of civil society organisations and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society around the world.

Who We Are

- 4,521 Members
- 1,298 Organisations
- 2,723 Individuals
- 175 Countries

15 funders support the work of the alliance including:

- 2 UN Agencies
- 1 Regional Body
- 5 Governments
- 4 Foundations
- 1 University
- 1 Fund

Click on the logos for more information on our funders.
The World We See and How We’re Responding
CIVICUS member The International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law recorded that between 2012 and 2015, laws that restricted civic space were adopted in 60 countries around the world. As of June 2018, 109 countries face serious civic space restrictions.

This acceleration in the restrictions on civic space is changing the way civil society – and the CIVICUS alliance – understands the world and mobilises to respond.

THESE SIX INTER-RELATED TRENDS SHAPED OUR WORK IN 2017/18:

1. Civic space is being restricted
   The CIVICUS Monitor – the alliance’s ground-breaking research platform – documents how in 2018, only four percent of the world’s population live in countries where civil society rights are routinely respected and where fundamental freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, and expression are enjoyed. The challenge for civil society is to document where restrictions are happening, uncover the drivers and enablers of restriction, and advocate for policies that protect and defend civic space. Together with 21 research partners we are tracking civic space and using our research to engage and influence the UN, regional bodies, and national governments.

2. Civil society is changing
   The composition of civil society is changing with increased online activism, greater numbers of social and protest movements often unconnected to established civil society, and anti-rights groups that are claiming civic space. The challenge is to convene conversations about what civil society means and how best to hold groups accountable, widen the tent, strengthen capacity, and demonstrate best practice. CIVICUS is responding by developing capacity building tools aligned with the evolving landscape, pioneering new forms of accountability through our Resilient Roots project, spreading best practices through our AGNA network of 80 national and regional associations, reaching out to new audiences, and providing a convening space at International Civil Society Week where ideas and experiences can be shared, and members and partners can meet, learn, discuss, and network with one another.

3. Authoritarianism and divisiveness are on the rise
   According to ParlGov.org, in the last 20 years there has been a surge in the share of the vote for populist authoritarian parliamentary parties across the 34 OECD countries; data from countries outside the OECD corroborates the trend. The challenge for civil society is to acknowledge the public frustration that is motivating citizens, offer an alternative, and incubate more participatory forms of deliberative democracy that safeguard against divisive politics. CIVICUS is responding by brokering conversations across lines of social and political division through our SPEAK! Campaign which together with 200 partner organisations convened 232 events in 65 countries in 2017.

4. The need for global cooperation is intensifying
   2017/18 saw withdrawals by countries from several key global frameworks and institutions as well as budget cuts across many parts of the UN. The challenge for civil society is to acknowledge the shortcomings of the international system and work within the current system for greater inclusion and accountability. In New York and Geneva, we have increased advocacy for democratic freedoms, leveraged accountability mechanisms, and convened diverse leaders to discuss reform.
5. Citizens are mobilising but momentum must be sustained

Large-scale protests resulted in the ouster of leaders in Armenia and South Korea, while the United States and countries in Europe and Latin America have seen significant public demonstrations on a wide range of issues. The challenge for civil society is in connecting different movements, building networks between diffuse protest movements and established organisations (to improve accountability and reach), and joining online and offline action. CIVICUS is bringing together a diverse set of actors to incubate new forms of organisations through its Vuka Coalition and sharing the stories of protest from Malaysia to Argentina including through our State of Civil Society Report in order to spread lessons learned and sustain long-term momentum where needed.

6. Ensuring equal access and inclusive participation is imperative

According to UN Women, 35 percent of women world-wide have experienced physical or sexual violence. In the last year, the #MeToo and Time’s Up movements have mobilised conversations on what constitutes sexual harassment and the implications of civic space restrictions on feminist movements, women human rights defenders and LGBTIQ activists. Civil society is well positioned to make specific demands to equalise political, economic and social power. This year, thanks to UN Women, we brought together civil society actors to discuss solutions to discrimination by state and non-state actors. We also engaged a Diversity and Inclusion Champion to develop targeted resources and learning opportunities for the greater CIVICUS alliance to fight sexual harassment and work toward inclusivity for all.

Through collaboration, generating and sharing knowledge, leveraging data, encouraging best practice and innovation, making connections, building solidarity, amplifying voices, and undertaking joint campaigning and advocacy, we can strengthen civil society’s capacity to respond to these challenges and build its sustainability and resilience around the world.
WHERE WE MADE A DIFFERENCE IN 2017/18
2017/2018 was the first year of implementation of our 2017-2022 Strategic Plan. Working with our members and partners we prioritised four inter-related goals:

GOAL ONE: DEFENDING CIVIC FREEDOMS AND DEMOCRATIC VALUES

Our work in defending civic freedoms and democratic values sits at the heart of all our organisational aims. We focus on three, inter-related workstreams:

Researching, analysing and curating global trends on civic freedoms and democratic values to substantively influence key stakeholders

- Our flagship 2018 State of Civil Society Report highlighting 10 key trends impacting civil society worldwide was downloaded over 1,000 times in the first month post-publication
- The CIVICUS Monitor, our participatory platform that tracks civic space conditions across the globe, had 46,142 annual unique visitors. The CIVICUS Secretariat and 21 research partners registered 657 updates in 2017/18.

Engaging decision makers and institutions at national, regional and international levels to encourage the protection and expansion of civic freedoms and democratic values

- At the international level, our UN work in Geneva centred on the 36th, 37th, and 38th sessions of the UN Human Rights Council. CIVICUS Secretariat and members hosted 21 side events, made 26 policy statements, co-sponsored 5 advocacy letters, and supported the attendance of 5 human rights defenders on country-specific advocacy.
- Our work advocating through the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process in Geneva resulted in: 36 UPR submissions on civic space challenges.
- Our UN advocacy in New York included 2 oral statements at the UN’s Economic and Social Council, 1 oral statement at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and 1 written statement at the United Nations Committee on NGOs.
- At the regional and national levels, we led targeted public advocacy initiatives on civic space restrictions in 18 countries – Burundi, Cameroon, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Madagascar, Nicaragua, Serbia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Venezuela, Zambia, Zimbabwe – engaging the: African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights (ACHPR), East African Community (EAC), European Union (EU), Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), and Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).
- To engage the public and influence key decision-makers, we published 25 policy statements, briefs, and open letters; 47 interviews with activists and civil society leaders; 55 media statements, and 66 opinion pieces.
- Supported by the Ford Foundation, our Vuka! Coalition expanded to 140 members bridging international and regional civil society groups which work together to support national civil societies to protect and expand civic space.

Defending civic freedoms and democratic values
Strengthening the power of people to organise, mobilise, and take action
Empowering a more accountable, innovative and effective civil society
Building a world class organisation

"OUR FLAGSHIP 2018 STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY REPORT HIGHLIGHTING TEN KEY TRENDS IMPACTING CIVIL SOCIETY WORLDWIDE WAS DOWNLOADED OVER 1000 TIMES."
Providing support and solidarity to civil society stakeholders whose work is impeded by restrictions on civic freedoms and the undermining of democratic values

● Through the Lifeline Embattled CSO Assistance Fund, civil society organisations in 17 countries under threat (Angola, Cameroon, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Oman, Palestine, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe) received emergency support. In addition, two regional requests (from Africa and the Middle East) received support. A consortium of 7 international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and 19 governments that aims to push back against threats to civic space makes this work possible.

“Civic space is closing all the time in my country and there is legislation that is seeking to close organisations… it has been good to communicate with others and especially human rights defenders and comparing experiences and strategies for dealing with issues.” - civicus member

● Our advocacy and campaigning efforts continue to focus on strengthening connections and solidarity with members and partners working in challenging contexts. To better connect our work in research with our advocacy, we expanded The CIVICUS Monitor’s methodology by introducing a Watch List – to identify countries where intervention is still possible to prevent further deterioration of civic freedoms.

GOAL TWO: STRENGTHENING THE POWER OF PEOPLE TO ORGANISE, MOBILISE AND TAKE ACTION

The 2017-2022 Strategic Plan shifted our focus from civil society organisations to the broader spectrum of citizen participation and action including ‘people power’ and non-formal civil society. In response, during 2017/18 we made key changes to our internal systems and ways of working, working with members and partners to update our membership policy and processes and strengthening our constituency feedback mechanisms to ensure that our systems will be responsive to a broader spectrum of members’ needs, priorities, and concerns.

To achieve Strategic Goal Two we focused on three workstreams:

● As a first step, we deepened our understanding of who makes up the CIVICUS alliance (including partners, allies and supporters) and how we can engage more strategically with our constituents through network mapping and landscape analysis of partners and those organisations working to protect civic space. We also updated and developed our relationship management database (which now counts 4,129 entries) so that we can map our various existing and new relationships with our constituents and build up detailed profiles over time.

● To encourage systems-level solidarity, 88 members of the Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA) were brought together to exchange skills and knowledge in three regional exchanges on digital security, storytelling, and communications, due to the generous support of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and the European Commission.

The Bahrain Centre for Human Rights is a long-standing CIVICUS member. When Executive Director Nabeel Rajab was imprisoned in 2016, staff approached us to raise awareness and to work together to leverage the situation to highlight the challenges facing human rights defenders in Bahrain. With the aim of building momentum for his release, in April 2018 CIVICUS nominated Nabeel for the Václav Havel Human Rights prize, awarded by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. We reached out to several international and regional organisations to join the effort including: Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Gulf Centre for Human Rights, International Service for Human Rights and OMCT – World Organisation Against Torture. Nabeel was one of three shortlisted candidates for the prize. The shortlisting intensified efforts to secure his release.

At the individual level, our Youth Working Group grew to over 1200 members. Youth events during 17/18 included a dedicated youth assembly at International Civil Society Week with 96 youth delegates, an inter-generational online mentoring programme with 102 participants, 19 youth participants and 14 AGNA members coming together to map youth engagement and discuss meaningful youth participation – thanks to the generous support of the European Union’s Erasmus+ Programme – and 83 global youth engaged in an arts symposium on Reimagining Democracy. Individual youth are now the largest community in the alliance.

For the general public, our SPEAK! 2017 campaign organised four days of action, to amplify citizen voices on a broad range of issues including transparency, freedom of expression, environmental and labour rights, and youth empowerment. We supported more than 200 partner organisations to convene 232 events in 65 countries and reached over 7.5 million online.

"The political head for the area told us that in 20+ years of her political life she had never mobilised as successfully as we did."
― SPEAK! event partner in Uganda

"…representatives of the state even took part in our activities, despite anything that doesn’t correspond to the ideas accepted by the government usually being prohibited in our country."
― SPEAK! event partner in Democratic Republic of Congo

Supporting people and their organisations to participate in and influence global forums, and monitor progress and hold governments to account on their global commitments on human rights, development and the environment.

CIVICUS member PIANGO (Pacific Islands Association of NGOs) and CIVICUS Secretariat brought together 634 delegates from 115 countries for International Civil Society Week in December 2017 to work together on creating solutions for global challenges and sharing what works to influence decision-makers. 2017 saw the first-ever articulation of event principles – sustainability, inclusion, participation, diversity, and transparency. 12 local and 1 virtual event took place preceding ICSC to broaden participation beyond those who were able to physically attend.

140 CIVICUS members participated in the Action for Sustainable Development (A4SD) platform, now counting 1,340 organisations and individuals in more than 150 countries (82 percent based in the Global South). A4SD convened over 1,000 sustainable development practitioners to design and deploy innovative approaches to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

CIVICUS Secretariat presents the concerns of CIVICUS members in interactions with the President of the UN Security Council on a monthly basis, including submitting questions for discussion. Three questions posed by CIVICUS members were addressed in 2017/2018.

Because the Declaration on Climate Induced Displacement was a result of the alliance’s work at International Civil Society Week 2017, CIVICUS was granted access to the negotiations for the Global Compact on Migration and was able to influence its contents. During our participation we facilitated the oral statement interventions of our Pacific partners, made media placements, including a joint op-ed on the issue of climate displacement (originally published in Project Syndicate) and hosted a series with renowned photographer GMB Akash which profiles individuals and communities being uprooted by rising sea levels in Bangladesh (originally published in the Hindustan Times). These media placements were shared on social media, tagging the lead negotiators of the Global Compact on Migration.
Building multi-stakeholder partnerships that contribute to resourcing and creating a more enabling environment for a resilient and diverse civil society.

- A new work stream on civil society resourcing dedicated to supporting the resilience and sustainability of diverse civil society actors engaged 185 civil society actors and funders through 5 civil society resourcing multi-stakeholder dialogues. The result? A global mapping and trends analysis on participatory grantmaking.

- To ensure progress, connection, and learning beyond physical events, CIVICUS’s partner Ariadne Network launched an online platform which has become a community of practice for funders and civil society groups to exchange information related to more direct and democratic civil society resourcing practices. 70 individuals joined in 2017/18.

- As part of our grant from the European Commission on Strengthening Umbrella Networks, the alliance brought together 50 participants from 16 countries to share organising models and resourcing strategies that support resilience.

GOAL THREE:
EMPOWERING A MORE ACCOUNTABLE, INNOVATIVE AND EFFECTIVE CIVIL SOCIETY

Evidence-based action, new forms of organising fit for the digital age, and accountability fuelled our work to empower a more accountable, effective, and innovative civil society during 2017/2018. As a first step in response to the targets set out in the Strategic Plan, we launched two new teams:

1) Impact and Accountability to create and apply monitoring and evaluation systems which will hold the Secretariat accountable and

2) Capacity Strengthening which takes what we learn and shares with CIVICUS members and partners in person and online.

While the early part of the year was spent putting these teams into place, we focused on three inter-related areas of work:

Overhauling and introducing alliance sector-wide capacity building products that are digitally accessible, engaging, and packed for scaled use.

- 67 CIVICUS members and partners participated in capacity strengthening workshops on digital security, working with data, and communications. Our digital security work was made possible due to the generous support of Stanford University. Digital Security workshop participants reported a knowledge increase of 157 percent.

“I PERSONALLY BELIEVE THE TRAINING WAS A GREAT SUCCESS IN EQUIPPING THE JOURNALISTS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISTS FROM DIFFERENT CORNERS OF THE GLOBE IN RECOGNIZING CYBER THREATS AND IN PREPARING THEM TO TAKE PREVENTIVE MEASURES TO COUNTER SUCH THREATS.” – TRAINING PARTICIPANT
Through our partnership with MobLab and the generous support of UNICEF, the Secretariat engaged with a network of 53 organisations and thousands of campaigners who are reimagining organisational models and campaign design. Events included: in-person training of 385 activists and 1700 campaigners from 80 countries engaged through 7 webinars.

We produced three toolkits in 2017/18: A Guide to Facilitation for first-time facilitators, How To Conceptually Organize Data, and Storytelling to build the alliance’s capacity for influence. Modelling and testing distributed civil society organisational models to improve the sustainability, security, and effectiveness of civil society action, particularly in repressed and closed civic spaces.

Innovation for Change (I4C) which supports individual activists and organisations to incubate new methods for organising, leveraging data, and supporting civic action expanded to include 7 regional hubs and 725 users of its online platform.

Innovation for Change and the CIVICUS Monitor co-hosted an event at RightsCon2018 in May 2018. RightsCon is the world’s largest event on defending human rights in the digital age and was attended by 2520 participants from 118 countries. Our session, “Civic Storytelling at the Frontlines: Connecting Local to Global narratives” brought speakers from Afghanistan, Tanzania, and the Philippines together to share their powerful stories about their fights against government, judicial harassment, imprisonment, and detainment and the innovative tools they use to communicate their stories from the ground. Speakers shared tips on how we can all improve our #civicstorytelling techniques. The inspiration from our RightsCon panelists helped diffuse ideas of storytelling and artivism across the Innovation for Change network. The South Asia hub were so inspired they are now planning a Youth Space Artivism Lab to bring together 43 youth activists from eight countries, to explore innovative advocacy methods through art, music, and theatre.

Introducing new metrics for measuring civil society performance that are grounded in people-generated evidence and prioritise accountability to the people that civil society serves.

238 organisations applied for 8 spots in the inaugural Resilient Roots programme. Funded by the Ford Foundation and together with CIVICUS partner Accountable Now and Member Keystone Accountability, we are testing whether better accountability to primary constituents makes for better resilience for civil society organisations working in restricted civic space.
The adoption of the 2017 – 2022 Strategic Plan resulted in restructuring and the need for significant growth in staff headcount. We have now appointed key staff members in critical positions to ensure that we have the capacity to achieve 6 key programmatic and organisational objectives as we work toward the milestones articulated in the Strategic Plan:

Building a global and diverse workforce
- As of 30 June 2018, CIVICUS Secretariat had 49 female and 22 male employees, representing 24 different nationalities distributed globally.
- While staff are encouraged to be stationed at one of our four offices, half of the staff now telecommute on a temporary or permanent basis. As a result we have retained key staff and mitigated difficulties around securing work visas for staff seeking to work at our Johannesburg headquarters.
- We commissioned Birches Group International to compare our human resources policies and remuneration against local and global peers.

Investing in our people
Staff training and development initiatives during 2017/18 covered three areas: capacity strengthening, mid-level management, and senior leadership development.

- The Learning Management System (LMS) is a key tool for ongoing and immediate capacity development needs for all staff. The system is designed for circumstances requiring repetitive training and is complimented by class-based training where necessary. Courses taken in 17/18 include: Portuguese language; Project Planning, Design for NGOs; Customer Experience Management; and People Management. 25 employees pursued 10 different courses during the reporting period for a cumulative 232 training hours.
- Executive coaching was identified as an important pillar of our leadership development programme. 5 individuals in senior and mid-level management received executive coaching during 17/18.
- 2 members of the Senior Leadership Team attended a Senior Leadership Development Programme offered by Syracuse University’s Maxwell School.
- We invested $51,000 USD for 65 staff to meet in Johannesburg in mid-May for a two-day Annual Staff Retreat. The retreat was an opportunity for staff to learn about and strengthen key programmatic, operational, and alliance-focused parts of our work. It also included an individualised Lumina leadership exercise for staff to develop their personal leadership capabilities.
Investing in HR systems and processes

- We implemented a new Staff Handbook, including several policy updates:
  - Our Recruitment and Selection Policy now includes a disability clause.
  - We are piloting various approaches in our recruitment to attract and accommodate a broader and more diverse pool of potential and actual applicants.
  - We have updated our Maternity and Breastfeeding Policy and created a breastfeeding and child space in the office.
  - Our internal Whistle Blowing Policy now has clearer reporting channels.

- Staff worked directly with their line managers through three rounds of performance management processes (in the fourth quarter of 2017 and first and second quarters of 2018) to streamline the performance management system and prioritise staff development and growth by ensuring accurate staff assessment based on current roles and responsibilities and an emphasis on areas where organisational support is warranted for individual growth.

- We updated our human resources leave and performance review system to a system which is technically superior and better integrates information between HR and Finance teams.

Improving our telecommunications and IT infrastructure

- We improved our Wi-Fi infrastructure in the Johannesburg Hub by introducing a new Wi-Fi Mesh system to support a more consultative and collaborative work culture and enable desk hopping within the office.

- We upgraded our conference facility equipment including computers, TV trolleys and a new microphone system to support more than one web-based meeting at a time. We also replaced staff laptops that had reached the end of their life.

- After extensive online research into free and low-cost options (the results of which were shared with members), CIVICUS Secretariat purchased new software, including 9 Adobe creative cloud suite licenses, Canva for graphic design, LumenS5 for video creation, and Piktochart for infographics.

- Finally, we upgraded our MS Azure Backup to improve our automatic backup of the Cloud server and replicate to more geo-locations to make provisions for disaster recovery. This also served to improve redundancy.

A key technical and communications milestone in 2017/2018 was our compliance with the EU’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which came into effect in May 2018. Designed to protect all EU citizens from privacy and data breaches, GDPR extended the scope of EU data protection law to all foreign organisations processing data of EU residents. In response we:

- Administered a data retention consent process for over 20,000 unique CIVICUS contacts
- Aggregated contact databases across the organisation
- Developed an organisational data privacy policy to ensure we are protecting our contacts to the best of our ability.

The result? A secure and consolidated database which allows us to better tailor CIVICUS content to individual interests.

"We improved our Wi-Fi infrastructure in the Johannesburg Hub."
Fulfilling our duty of care to our Staff and constituents

● We procured the services of a Travel Management Company (TMC) to ensure that CIVICUS sanctioned travel for staff, members and other partners is centralised. As we continue to embed the travel systems and processes within the organization, we are also working to develop an Emergency Response Plan to ensure that our travellers are clear on what procedures to follow should they encounter certain emergency situations.

● We negotiated global travel insurance cover for all CIVICUS staff and consultants, Board members, CIVICUS membership and our broader constituents on CIVICUS sanctioned travel.

Strengthening Governance

● Our 13-member Board of Directors is made up of CIVICUS Voting members nominated and selected by fellow Voting members. 70 percent of Board members attended Board meetings in 17/18. 5 new Board members joined; 21 percent of Board members are under age 30.

● At its December 2017 meeting, the Board discussed and finalised the organisation’s Accountability Framework. In May 2018, it discussed progress made against strategic priorities and future plans to ensure CIVICUS continues to operate within its mandate and means.

● The Board took time off from their meeting in May 2018 for a session with all CIVICUS staff to participate in a Lumina Learning group exercise on improving leadership and organisational change through greater self-awareness of personality traits.

 HOW WE CONNECT

WE COMMUNICATE TO SHARE INFORMATION, ADVOCATE ON BEHALF OF CIVIC SPACE, AMPLIFY THE VOICES OF OUR MEMBERS AND PARTNERS, AND CONNECT CIVIL SOCIETY TO EACH OTHER.

WE REACHED AND CONNECTED MORE PEOPLE IN 17/18 THAN IN ANY PREVIOUS YEAR.

THE CIVICUS WEBSITE RECEIVED 120,000 UNIQUE VISITS IN 17/18, A 330% INCREASE.

WE PUBLISHED 66 OPINION ARTICLES AND 55 MEDIA RELEASES IN A WIDE VARIETY OF ONLINE AND PRINT PUBLICATIONS.

437 ARTICLES WERE WRITTEN ABOUT CIVICUS AND ITS WORK IN 17 LANGUAGES: Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, English, Farsi, French, German, Greek, Hindi, Italian, Korean, Latvian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, and Spanish.

5,424 INDIVIDUALS SUBSCRIBED TO OUR E-CIVICUS NEWSLETTER.

OUR SOCIAL MEDIA FOOTPRINT NOW COUNTS 14,250 TWITTER FOLLOWERS AND 42,022 FACEBOOK FANS.

“CIVICUS CAN SERVE AS A MODEL ORGANISATION IN THE SECTOR. IT IS QUICKLY MOVING INTO THAT SPACE AND CAN BECOME A MODEL IN THE WAY THEY ORGANISE THEIR WORK.”

- BOARD MEMBER
Holding Ourselves Accountable
The goals of our dynamic accountability work are: 1) to facilitate meaningful ways for our members, partners, and donors to hold the Secretariat accountable for policies and programmes; 2) to help ensure the achievement of the organisational goals set out in the Strategic Plan; and 3) to continuously measure the impact and learn from the work of the alliance.

- Our Annual General Meeting (AGM) continues to be the focal point for members to meet and discuss the work of the alliance.
- Beyond the AGM, we have created new ways to gather feedback online to ensure broad access and continuous improvement.
  - A key innovation this year has been to tweak the process to ensure that communication and updates flow back to the source.
  - We updated our feedback policy and online feedback form to ensure that the public are able to share feedback, suggestions, and complaints.
- Our Annual Constituency Survey allows us to track results year on year.

442 members responded to our Annual Constituency Survey in 2017/18.

At a systems level, we created an Accountability Framework this year which tracks the progress and impact of the organisation, helps us meet accountability commitments, and enables organisational learning.

We also developed a series of long-term critical learning questions to understand the impact of our work under each of the Strategic Goals. The intention is to understand whether CIVICUS is progressing according to plan, what activities are working well, and where CIVICUS may need to change course and adapt ideally in real time.

We have begun implementation of the Framework through two processes: 1) by systematic capturing of performance data and evidence progress against strategy through our new online monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system DevResults and 2) by providing opportunities for all staff to reflect on the data captured and to analyse trends, accelerants and challenges to inform course correction decisions and deepen our understanding of our contribution to the sector.

In addition to our regular monitoring and reporting, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) commissioned an external evaluation of CIVICUS’ organisational capacity in relation to the demands posed by the new Strategic Plan, and analysed synergy and complementarity with a particular focus on our Civic Space Initiative (CSpI) and the Innovation for Change Programme. Their findings and recommendations are available here.
WHERE WE GOT IT WRONG AND WHAT WE LEARNED IN 2017/2018
Due to 17/18 being the first year of implementation of the new Strategic Plan, the volume and complexity of the work required of the Secretariat was significantly more than in any previous year.

It required us to greatly expand programming levels and maintain good performance in our work while at the same time transition our operations, systems, and pace to align with the new strategy’s scale of ambition. We have identified five stumbling blocks we experienced during the year which impacted how effectively we were able to engage with and be responsive to our constituents and their needs.

THEY INCLUDE:

- **Unrealistic projections for goals and objectives**
  We failed to consider the transition we were experiencing and did not adequately anticipate the systems and work process lags that would result. As a result, we made unrealistic plans and, in some cases, failed to set targets. While we were able to accomplish much of what we set out to do at a level that was in line with our standards, our teams stretched themselves to the limit, in some cases leading to individuals leaving the organisation. There were also places where we simply did not deliver. We have strengthened and systematised our institutional planning in response, building additional human resources as needed.

- **Staff turnover**
  While there was high staff turnover in the first half of the year as a result of the restructuring and because of unanticipated departures, the restructure clearly took a toll on staff. We were not prepared with an alternative staffing plan and therefore our recruitment systems were overwhelmed. The time that was lost in addressing these gaps and having no dedicated staff or temporary staff in key activity areas caused significant delays in work delivery. In addition, new decision-making processes that were planned were delayed because of the lack of personnel in key posts, compromising their effectiveness and slowing down the implementation of the Strategic Plan. In response, we brought in additional capacity for the human resources team through a long-term consultancy arrangement while we put in place a more permanent solution.

- **Improvised Systems**
  A constant pain point throughout the year was the prevalence of band-aid solutions in operations and financial systems. Many of our systems including data management, procurement, financial processing, and IT were and continue to be under stress due to growth in the scope and breadth of programming. These improvised solutions have resulted in duplication of efforts and a heavy use of staff time. Work continues to institutionalise and understand the implications of integration across the organization and to find solutions that are fit-for-purpose.

- **Delays on key deliverables**
  While there were several initiatives and projects that were delayed across the organisation, among the most significant was that the reviewing and redrafting of our membership policy took the first six months of the year to complete. The late date of approval by our Board meant that no significant changes to composition of the membership took place in 2017/18. However, data gathered to date in 18/19 confirms that changes to the composition of the membership aligned with the goals set out in the Strategic Plan have now begun.

- **Inadequate knowledge sharing and engagement**
  We did not prioritise knowledge sharing within the alliance, nor did we adequately plan for multilingual content or outreach in 2017/18 – something which came to light from member feedback. In response, we have invested in training our teams to use new software and tools while also launching a multilingual website and social media channels through which to engage continuously with our French and Spanish speaking members.
BEYOND THESE SPECIFIC SHORTCOMINGS IN 2017/18, WE LEARNED FOUR INTER-RELATED LESSONS THIS YEAR THAT WILL CONTINUE TO SHAPE THE ORGANISATION AS IT EVOLVES:

• The power of knowing ourselves, strong partnerships, and smart division of labour
  Among the critical learning questions in our Accountability Framework is – What is CIVICUS’s unique value add (in the universe of organisations acting to defend and protect civic space)? Continually asking and answering this question and leveraging impact data to identify our comparative advantage is critical to the health and continued relevance of our alliance. Equally, clarity on its answer(s) will allow us to focus organisational efforts and resources and extend our capabilities and impact through partnerships that are truly fit-for-purpose.

• The need to deeply understand our impact
  Relatedly, as an alliance and as an institution, we are still learning how and where to make the most meaningful impacts to protect and defend civic freedoms, strengthen the power of people to organise, mobilise, and take action, hold decision-makers to account, strengthen capacity, and foster innovation and resilience across civil society world-wide. In addition, we take seriously our responsibility to be transparent and share this information so that the alliance and our Partners can hold the Secretariat accountable. Finally, particularly given the changing environment, we as the Secretariat must create ways to help the alliance and civil society more broadly measure and understand areas of greatest need and impact locally, regionally, and globally.

• The need to focus to ensure quality
  Given limited human and material resources, strategic focus (informed by data) on programme selection, design and implementation must be a key priority. Particularly in this year of transition, we learned that we must continually question and be strategic about new programmatic activity, and first focus, consolidate, and prioritise existing work. This need for focus goes hand-in-hand with ensuring robust and regular cross-cluster collaboration to ensure we properly leverage synergies and impact organisation-wide. We realise that the increase in our programmatic activities poses a long-term institutional risk of poor quality outputs caused by the volume of work and inadequate quality control and are developing the systems and processes to mitigate the risk.

• The importance of online collaboration and getting out of the way
  To realise the full potential of the alliance, we will need to create new ways for members to connect directly with each other without these opportunities needing to occur in person or be facilitated by the Secretariat. We continue to adhere to the strong belief that the true power of the CIVICUS alliance lies within and between its members, partners, and broader networks.

Going forward, we intend to use these mistakes and these lessons as an input into ongoing planning and work.
CIVICUS’s financial position is on solid footing. The audited 17/18 aggregate financial statements reflect:

15 donors including global institutions, regional bodies, national governments, foundations, civil society organisations, and academia made programmes and initiatives across all four Strategic Goals possible. Highlights include:

- Anticipated resource trajectory for 18/19 is aligned with the scale of ambition outlined in the Strategic Plan.
- 8% increase in total assets
- $602,572 increase in income
- $1,431,338 increase in expenditure
- $166,693 increase in reserves

17% of total expenses (USD 1,673,523) were distributed as sub-grants to over 50 civil society organisations worldwide or as support for partner travel and participation.

USD $1,500,375 was invested in hosting alliance events and convening stakeholders.

Our top funders for 17/18 were: Swedish International Development Agency, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ford Foundation, and European Commission. Their contributions accounted for 78% of total income.

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We will never give up on our beautiful planet!
As you’ve just read, 17/18 was a year filled with much activity – from advocating on behalf of civic space protections to decision-makers nationally, regionally, and globally to bringing a diverse set of stakeholders together to share ideas on how to work most effectively – all while building the internal operational systems and foundations of our Strategic Plan. 18/19 will, in some ways, be the first year that systems are in place and we begin the heavy lifting. Given that it is also a year that will be infused with new leadership for CIVICUS and given all the changes happening in society as the environment for civic space continues to evolve, we know it will be a busy and dynamic one. Yet even in times of change, members, partners, and the wider alliance are at the heart of what we do. We very much look forward to working across the alliance on making our vision of a worldwide community of informed and committed citizens working together to confront the challenges facing humanity a reality. And for those who have yet to get involved – please join us!
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